

THE BALLAD OF READING
GAOL 415

And through a murderer's collar take
His last look at the sky?

It is sweet to dance to violins

When Love and Life are

fair:

To dance to flutes,, to dance

to lutes

Is delicate and rare:

But it is not sweet with nimble feet

To dance upon the air!

So with curious eyes and sick surmise

We watched him day by

day,

And wondered if each

one of us

Would end the self-same

way,

For none can tell to what

red Hell

His sightless soul may stray.

At last the dead man walked no more

Amongst the Trial Men,

And I knew that he was standing up

In the black dock's dreadful pen,

And that never would I see his face

In God's sweet world again.

Like two doomed ships that pass in

storm

We had crossed each other's way:

But we made no sign, we said no word,

We had no word to say;

For we did not meet in the holy night,

But in the shameful day.

A prison wall was round us both.

Two outcast men. we were:

The world had thrust us from its heart,

And God from out His

care:

And the iron gin that waits

for Sin

Had caught us in its snare.

III

IN Debtors' Yard the stones are hard,

And the dripping wall is

high,

So it was there he took

the air

Beneath the leaden sky,

And by each side a Warder walked,

For fear the man might die.